

ANSWERS

TO THE

REASONS of DISSENT,

From the Sentence of the Reverend Commission of the General Assembly on *March 11th 1752.*

K Scotland, Church of, General Assembly

BY

The COMMITTEE of the COMMISSION

Appointed to draw up Answers to them,

EDINBURGH:

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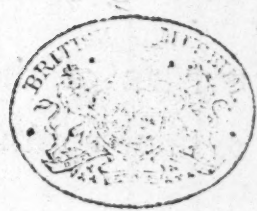
A. J. S. W. E. R.

THE HISTORY OF DISSENT

FROM THE REFORMATION OF THE 16TH

TO THE PRESENT TIME

BY JOHN W. E. R.



INTRODUCTION.

THE Committee appointed to answer the Reasons of Dissent, from the Judgment of the Commission in *March* last, relating to the Settlement of the Parish of *Inverkeithing*, cannot but remark in the Entry, and they remark it with Concern, That the Dissenters have so unhappily degenerated from the mild Spirit, and cautious Measures, of some of the wisest of our Predecessors.---- Who does not know, that these Reverend Fathers carefully avoided bringing such Cases upon the Field, as that which the Dissenters blame the Commission for sending off in the least hurtful Manner.

And, what is it they complain of? It can be nothing but this, That the Commission treated their Brethren of the Presbytery of *Dunfermline* with more Lenity, and used greater Forbearance towards them in their straitning Circumstances, than was agreeable to the Mind of the Dissenters.

But, however loud the Cry that has been raised upon this Occasion, we have the Pleasure to observe, That after near Six Weeks indulged to the Dissenters, to find the Reasons of their Dissent, they have not been able to bring out so much as one that touches the Point in Hand.

[]

We are far from intending to disparage the Gentlemen's Abilities: We know most of them too well for that: And we dare say, there is no one of these, but, as an *Individual*, under the Conduct of his own Understanding, and without the *Advantages of Society*, could have made a much better Performance in five or six Hours, if he had chosen a better Subject to work upon: but there are some Subjects that will cramp the strongest Abilities, and depress the brightest Genius.

Who, before the Dissenters, ever contended, that the mild Exercise of acknowledged Authority, in a particular Case, is destructive of all Government, Civil and Ecclesiastick? No wonder, then, if after all nothing hath appeared under the Name of Reasons of Dissent, but a Paper wholly made up, either of loose and unguarded Propositions; or of such general Principles as Nobody denies, quite misapplied in the present Argument: which will manifestly appear from the following Answers, tho' unavoidably hurried by the Shortness of the Time, which the Dissenters, and the Venerable Assembly, have thought fit to allow us.

EDINBURGH, May 16.

1752.

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ANSWERS

TO THE

REASONS of DISSENT, &c.

WE must begin with stating the Case, as it appeared before the Reverend Commission; as that was, certainly, the Foundation of their Sentence: And this we hope to state in such a Manner, as Nobody shall be able to contradict us in Matters of Fact; or, if any do, we shall be able to make them good.

The Reverend Commission, in *November*, had appointed the Presbytery of *Dunfermline* to admit Mr. *Richardson* Minister at *Inverkeithing*, on the 3d *Wednesday* of *January* last; and the Moderator of the said Presbytery to preach the Sermon, and go through the usual solemn Forms on such Occasions. This Appointment, it was found, they had not obeyed: upon which they were unanimously, or without any Opposition, called to the Bar of the Commission in *March*, to give the Reasons why they had not obeyed it: To what Purpose, if these Reasons were not to come under the serious Consideration of that Commission, or were to have no Weight with it, whatever they should be?

The Reverend Moderator, and other Members of that Presbytery, with all Humility and Submission, represented to the Commission, That they owned, "That the Authority of the supreme Court, once interposed in the Decision of any Settlement,

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" ment, takes away the Right of Inferiors to op-
 " pose it; That it would be high Presumption in
 " them to do so; That the Rules of Society and
 " good Order required them, in their inferior Ca-
 " pacity, peaceably to suffer it to take Effect; and
 " they were ready, as Order required, to lay their
 " Hand upon their Mouth. But, allowing that,
 " in some Cases, the Orders of Superiors might be
 " innocently executed by those who cannot ap-
 " prove of them; Would it be said, that they
 " might do this in all Cases; and that it is abso-
 " lutely necessary for the Preservation of the Con-
 " stitution, to force this Rule into universal Prac-
 " tice, That Inferiors must execute the Appoint-
 " ments of their Superiors, in whatever Light
 " they appeared to them, of Right or Wrong, of
 " Sin or Duty? A severer Establishment than
 " this (they said) could not well be imagined;
 " and the Presbyterian Constitution they reckoned
 " was so friendly to true Liberty, while it curbed
 " Licentiousness, that this could not be its Com-
 " pletion: They knew of no Set of professed Pres-
 " byterians, who were of such high Principles, unless
 " it were the *Seceders*. Withal they acknowledged,
 " it would be an unaccountable Perverseness of
 " Spirit in them, to incur the Displeasure of their
 " Superiors, by sitting their Orders, without Ne-
 " cessity. But what Conduct of theirs had ever
 " given Occasion once to suspect them of such a
 " strange Cast of Mind? They appealed to all who
 " knew them, if they were not good Friends to the
 " Presbyterian Constitution; and if there was any
 " Wildness in their Character, from which the Peace
 " of the Church was in any Danger: They heartily
 " wished they could view all the Decisions of their
 " Superiors in such a Light, as that they could

" be
 "

" be themselves the active Executors of their Ap-
 " pointments. They had not hastily taken up the
 " Resolution of not obeying in the present Case;
 " but thought themselves highly concerned seri-
 " ously to weigh the Matter: They had done it;
 " so that if their Judgment was wrong, their In-
 " dolence was not to blame for their Error. Nor
 " did they think they wanted Courage to do what
 " appeared to be their Duty, whether Men be
 " pleased or not, mean Men or great Men: But
 " after weighing the Matter, they might be allow-
 " ed some Capacity of judging, so far as concerned
 " *their own Actions*, what might be the most likely
 " Methods of preserving or destroying Peace, and
 " promoting or marring the Success of the Gospel,
 " in *their own Bounds*. And if they had not been
 " perswaded, upon deliberate Thought, that their
 " complying with the Injunction of the last Com-
 " mission would do more Hurt than Good, they
 " would not have so much as *lingred* in the Exe-
 " cution of the Appointment: and in saying so,
 " they hoped they had the same Right with other
 " Men of Character for common Honesty, to be
 " believed sincere. They plainly saw, that the
 " most likely Consequences of their having an
 " active Hand in that Settlement, would be the
 " marring of their Success and Usefulness among
 " their People, for promoting those great Ends of
 " their Ministry which they had hitherto endea-
 " voured faithfully to pursue among them; and so
 " would turn to the Hurt of the People commit-
 " ted to *their* Care in their most important Con-
 " cerns: and likewise render them incapable of
 " giving such Assistance to their Reverend Brother,
 " for strengthening his Hands in the Work of their
 " common Lord, as they might be able to do, if

“ he should come to be settled among them and
 “ ther Way : and they could not think of know-
 “ ingly having an active Hand in such unhappy
 “ Consequences : Nor was it easy for them to sup-
 “ port themselves with this Reflection, that they
 “ had acted in Obedience to their Superiors ; and
 “ that it was properly the Deed of their Superiors,
 “ not theirs : they could not feel great Weight in
 “ such a Distinction, to determine their Conduct.
 “ They humbly submitted to the superior Judica-
 “ tories, if *they* should bear hard upon them, for
 “ following their Consciences in a Matter of this
 “ Kind ; they must also, for Conscience Sake, take
 “ it patiently : but if their Superiors should treat
 “ them with Severity ; they meant no Disrespect in
 “ saying, they would mistake their *Friends*, and
 “ Friends of the Constitution, for *Foes*.”

After such a Defence and Plea at their Bar,
 what did the Reverend Commission ? why, they
 are complained of, merely for *not doing* what the
 Dissenters would have had them do : “ Considering
 “ the whole Affair, and particularly the foresaid
 “ Defences, they resolved to inflict no Censure
 “ upon the said Presbytery upon account of their
 “ foresaid Conduct.”

And this is the Sentence against which such hi-
 deous Outcries are made by the Dissenters ; as
 inconsistent with the Nature and first Principles
 of Society ; absolutely inconsistent with the Na-
 ture and Preservation of Ecclesiastical Society ;
 in a particular Manner inconsistent with Presby-
 terian Church-government, and with the uniform
 Practice and Procedure of this Church.

But all this is advanced without any Shadow
 of Proof : Most of what they say upon these
 Heads

Heads consists of unconnected Assertions, instead of Arguments: Their Assertions are strongly expressed indeed, but withal so vague and general, that the great Difficulty is, to find out what they would be at. And this we hope to make appear, by following the Gentlemen a little thro' their loose Harangues upon these Heads.

I. On the first, They begin with a Comparison, betwixt the Obligations upon Men considered as Individuals; and when associated together, and under Government. In the whole of what they say upon this Head, we cannot avoid observing, That they keep it quite out of View, that every Man, whether in a separate or associated State, is under the absolute Dominion of God his Creator, the Lord of his Spirit, and the supreme Parent of human Society. We shall not say, that this is done with any Design. But it would seem that it has not appeared of Importance to their Argument to mention it: but we reckon it of great Importance to our Defence, never to lose Sight of this, "that Men in every State and Capacity are under the Dominion of God, whose Authority is Supreme, and Paramount to all other." It seems to be this gross Oversight, that has occasioned the Dissenters to stumble in the very Threshold, and set out with this crude and unguarded Assertion, "that when Men are considered as Individuals, *they* acknowledge, that they have no Guide but their own Understanding, and no Judge but their own Conscience." They might have spared the Compliment of saying, they *acknowledge* this; for we know of Nobody who wants such an Acknowledgement from them. We believe, that Men considered as Individuals, have the Moral Law of God written in their Hearts, and have a Sense of this

this awful Truth, that, *if their Hearts condemn them, God is greater than their Hearts.*

But after some other unaccurate Assertions, together with some Maxims which no Body can deny; they add, "That the Judgment of
 " the Legislative Power in Society must necessarily be absolute and final; and no sooner
 " is a Regulation enacted by it, than private
 " Judgment is so far superseded, that even they
 " who disapprove it are notwithstanding bound
 " to obey it, and to put it in Execution if required." Let us strip these Assertions of Expressions that may have some Ambiguity in them, or about which a Dust might be raised, (such as *private Judgment so far superseded, &c.*) and state the Comparison in plain Terms, and so as it must be stated to found any Argument against the Sentence of the Commission; and it must run thus: "That
 " however every single Man, when under no human Government, is to exercise the Reason and
 " Understanding that God has given him, in attending to all the Discoveries God has any ways
 " afforded him of his Will; and to act in every
 " Thing as he is firmly perswaded God requires him to do; and never do any Thing that he apprehends contrary to his Will: yet when he comes
 " under any human Government, and the supreme
 " Legislative Power in that Society commands him to do any Thing, he is blindly and implicitly to obey; he is either never to put the Question with himself, whether the Thing be sinful
 " and contrary to the Will of God, or not? or if, upon his best Enquiry, he is ever so much convinced that it is sinful, he is not to stop upon
 " that Conviction, but still to obey his earthly
 " Su

“Superiors.” Unless the Dissenters will say this, they say nothing to the Purpose, either of condemning the Conduct of the Presbytery of *Dunfermline*, or the Sentence of the Commission in the present Case.

We shall not now insist upon it, that to assert such an absolute unlimited Authority in the supreme Powers in every Society, and apply it to Ecclesiastical Government, would be raising Church Power to as high a Pitch of Dominion, as ever He pretended to, whom the Canon Law calls, *Dominus Deus noster Papa*; but whom the Apostle *Paul* characterizes, as *opposing and exalting himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as GOD sitteth in the Temple of GOD, shewing himself that he is GOD*. But we must here observe, that such Doctrine would carry the Matter of Obedience to the supreme Powers in Civil Society much farther, than the highest Patrons of the most absolute passive Obedience and Non-resistance generally do; who, at least, allow People this *hard* Choice; either *actively* to obey *all* Commands of the Sovereign; or *passively* to submit to his Will, and to whatever Punishments he may please to inflict for Disobedience. But to assert, that active Obedience, in *all* Cases, without Reserve, and without asking Questions, is to be pay'd to the supreme Powers, even in civil Society, is scarce to be paralleled, but by some Expressions of ranting Writers; and an Act of the Parliament of *Scotland*, in the Reign of King *James VII*, Parl. 1. Sess. 1. Act 2. where the Estates of Parliament declare, “That our Kings are invested
“with *absolute* Authority; and that they abhor
“and detest all Principles and Positions, which are
“contrary and derogatory to the King's sacred,
“su-

“supreme, *absolute* Power and Authority; and
 “that they hold themselves obliged—to assure
 “all his Enemies—that they are firmly resolved
 “to give their entire Obedience to his Majesty,
 “*without Reserve.*” This Act, with many others
 of that Parliament, are rescinded in the first Par-
 liament after the late glorious Revolution. But,
 agreeably to it, the famous Dr. *Parker* * speaks
 out plainly, and without Disguise or Evasion, what
 some now seem to aim at: “In Cases and Dis-
 “putes of publick Concernment, says he, private
 “Men are not properly *sui juris*: They have no
 “Power over their *own Actions*: They are not
 “to be directed by their own Judgments, or de-
 “termined by their own Wills; but by the Com-
 “mands and Determinations of the publick Con-
 “science: And if there be any *Sin* in the Com-
 “mand, he that imposes it shall answer for it; not
 “I, whose whole Duty it is to obey: The Com-
 “mands of Authority will warrant my Obedience;
 “My Obedience will *hallow*, or at least *excuse* my
 “Action; and so secure me from *Sin*, if not from
 “Error.”

If the *Dissenters* will not say as much as this;
 they say nothing to the Purpose of the present Ar-
 gument: For, as it is of the greatest Importance
 here, that the Question be *once* fairly and distinct-
 ly stated; we must observe, That the Question is
 not, “Whether Men in Society are bound *in many*
 “*Cases* to follow the Judgment of the Society?”
 but, “Whether they are bound to do so *in all Cases*
 “*without Exception*?” nor, “Whether the Judge-
 “ment of the Legislative Power must be final?”
 so as to be reversible only by themselves; and that
 they have a Power of putting it in Execution,

which

* Pref. to Dr. *Bramhall's* Vindication, p. 308.

which they may do, by laying their Injunctions on such as do not think it sinful to obey them : But, " Whether it must be *absolute*;" so as it must necessarily be obeyed *without Reserve*: as to which, we are perfectly clear to say in the Words of our *Confession of Faith*, Chap. 20. §. 2. " That the " requiring of an implicate Faith, and an *absolute* " and *blind* Obedience, is to destroy Liberty of " Conscience, and Reason also." Neither is it the Question, " If they who *disapprove* a publick Regulation" (if, by *disapproving* it, is meant any thing *less*, than thinking it sinful to obey it) " are " notwithstanding, bound to obey it; and to put it " in Execution, if required?" But, " Whether " *they* are bound to *obey*, or *execute* it, who, on " the most serious Deliberation, think it sinful, " and contrary to the Will of God, the supreme " Lord of all, to *obey* or *execute* it? or if Inferiors " are never to take *that Point* into their serious " Consideration; but blindly and implicitly to o- " bey, or execute, the Regulation; without asking " Questions."

And, that this is, in Reality, the great Point in Question, betwixt the Dissenters and those they so loudly exclaim against; we hope to make evident, both from what is plainly allowed by those against whom they point their Complaint; and from the Arguments openly pled in Defence of the high *Measures* they themselves contend for. As to what has been openly allowed, by those whom they treat as Opposers of *all* Power, Civil and Ecclesiastical: not to repeat what is contained in the *Plea* for the *Presbytery* of *Dunfermline*, above-recited; which seems to us to carry the Point of Submission to Superior Powers, or Superior Judicatories, as high as any Protestants

can allow, or any human Authority can well claim: It was further declared, at the Bar of the last General Assembly, in Name of a Presbytery whom yet they thought fit to censure; * That a Regard to the Authority of the Church is, no doubt, a laudable Principle; and will always have just Weight with every good and judicious Member of Society; when under no Difficulties, but such as that Regard is able to conquer: that it never was a Question with them, that the final Sentences of the supreme Court must be executed: Without a Power to execute, as well as to appoint, we would have no Constitution." They readily allowed, "That Transgressions of the Laws, or Neglect of the Orders of the Society whereof one is a Member, ought never to be stated upon a slight Ground; nor any less solid Foundation, than one could state leaving the Society upon, if the Judgment of those who have the Power of admitting and excluding should so determine." On the other Hand, it was alledged, "That it seemed not, at any Time, to have been the Sense either of Church or State among us, that *absolute* Obedience to Authority in *all* possible Cases, is so essential to Government, as to be indispensibly necessary to the Support of the Constitution: Nay, the Wisdom and Prudence of such as have been Directors in both, lead us to this quite contrary Conclusion; that rigid insisting upon strict Obedience, in some Cases, tended to the Hurt of the Constitution; while Moderation and Lenity have been judged the securest Measures of strengthening and supporting it. Nobody (they supposed) would maintain, that *absolute*

* See Scots Magazine for March last P. 137.

" *lute* and unlimited *Obedience* was either required
 " or promised, in a Protestant Church: Absolute
 " *Submission* they understood; and admitted to be
 " required by our Constitution; the Effect of
 " which is an Obligation to retire, in a peaceable
 " and respectful Manner, when the Judicatories
 " of the Church declare any of her Members inca-
 " pable of continuing in Communion, and enjoying
 " the Privileges of the Establishment. And, if
 " uniform Obedience to Authority, in *all* possible
 " Cases, should come to be insisted upon, as a
 " Term of Communion among us, in order to
 " distress either Presbyteries, or particular Mem-
 " bers, who have not Freedom to act in some
 " Circumstances; and that too, when the Nature
 " of the Thing, and former Practice, point out
 " Methods of effectually executing *final Sentences*,
 " which are not attended with those Inconveni-
 " encies; *they* could make no Hesitation in their
 " Choice, betwixt peaceable *retiring*, if the Church
 " Judicatures judged it proper to dismiss them;
 " and *acting* a Part, in Consequence of Measures
 " which, in their humble Opinion, must not only
 " prove hurtful, but ruining, to our most valu-
 " able Interests."

From such clear and distinct Declarations; the
 true State of the present Question, which has quite
 escaped the *Dissenters* (for we do not chuse to say,
 they artfully avoid it) may be abundantly plain to
 any who have Eyes to see. This will likewise be
 further evident; if we consider the Arguments (if
 they may be called so) that have been openly
 pled, in Defence of severe Measures with those
 who declared, " That their not obeying or execu-
 " ting the Sentence of their Superiors proceeded
 " *only* from their honestly judging, upon the most

" serious Consideration of the particular Case, that
 " it was sinful *for them* to obey, or execute it."
 Some of these Arguments, with the Illustrations of
 them, seem now to be drop't: but they were too
remarkable to be forgot. Was it not alledged, that
 " when Appointments of Superiors are once made,
 " the Consciences of Inferiors had nothing to do,
 " but obey them: that it did not belong to In-
 " feriors to examine the Orders of their Superi-
 " ors, or call them in question; else *all* Govern-
 " ment would be at an End: whether these Orders
 " were *right* or *wrong*, was none of *their* Busi-
 " ness: they were the Deeds of their Superiors,
 " not theirs; and they were only to be Executors
 " of them." We may adventure to say (by the
 by) that if such were the Maxims of the supreme
 Powers, in any Society; they should get a *Mill*, or
 some *Machine* to execute their Sentences! for
 sure, such Principles could never be applied to ra-
 tional Creatures of God, who are answerable to
 Him, their supreme Judge, for all their own Acts
 and Deeds; whatever Way they are put upon doing
 them: nor will it be a Defence, or Excuse, before
 his awful Tribunal, that in *doing an Action* which
 their Consciences told them was contrary to His
 Will, they *willingly* (or headlong, and without
 asking Questions) *walked after the Commandment*
 of any Earthly Superior whatsoever. But, in Sup-
 port of such Maxims, Instances have been adduced;
 which may be Proofs of what *is* actually done, but
 not of what *ought* to be done: Comparisons have
 been made, some of them not so very decent: In-
 ferior Judicatories, put upon executing the Orders
 of their Superiors, have been compared to the
common Hangman: " And is he, poor Wretch! to
 " review

" review the Trial, and take the Matter over again
 " under *his* Cognisance, before he'll execute one
 " condemned to die as a Criminal? No, *his* Business
 " is not to take Cognisance of the Sentence, but only
 " to execute it, or *lay down* his Post." By the by,
 we are not sure of this last: we know he is liable
 to be deprived of it. But, is not even *he*, if any
 Doubt arises in his Mind, whether the *Action* he
 is put upon, in the Exercise of his Office, is not
Murder; to give that Matter a serious Considera-
 tion, according to his Capacity, as a *reasonable*
Creature of God, answerable to him? And if upon
 this, he is convinced *it is Murder*; is he still to
 commit it? and will it be his Warrant before God
 for doing so, " That it was in the Exercise of his
 " Office; and that he was neither *Law-giver* nor
 " *Judge*, but only *Executioner*." To the like Pur-
 pose has the Comparison been adduced, of *Soldiers*
 who must obey the Commands of their *Officers*,
 without asking Questions, or be liable to be broke,
 or perhaps shot. We are very sensible, that there
 is a peculiar Necessity for it, that Military Govern-
 ment must be the most *absolute and arbitrary* of
 any; and therefore, we conceive, the most improper
 to be brought into Comparison with Church Go-
 vernment. However, we may figure a Case, with
 respect to *absolute Obedience* even under that
 Government: Let us suppose a *Captain* detach-
 ed with his Company, upon an Expedition in
 an Enemy's Country: They are to pass through
 a Village; and the Captain commands them, as
 they pass through it, to put to the Sword every
 one that appears in the Street, *Man, Woman and*
Child: They refuse to obey; perhaps too from a
 lower Principle, than either Conscience or Huma-
 nity; remonstrating, that they heard their Colonel,
 when

when they were detached, give strict Orders to *spare Women and Children*, wherever they came: We know not but by the Military Law (with which we do not pretend to be very well acquainted) the Captain might decimate them, and command the Nine men to shoot the Tenth; but sure, we may ask, Would any but a very wicked, any but a mad Captain, do it?

But, to what Purpose is all this, may some say? Do the Dissenters now assert, that Inferiors are, in *all Cases*, to obey or execute the Orders of their Superiors, or even of the supreme legislative Power in Society, without asking Questions in any Case? Not *absolutely*, and without *Distinction*: For they favour us with this Exception, and *this only*; “ They are to obey, and put in Execution, if required; UNLESS in a Case of such *gross* Iniquity, and manifest Violation of the original Design of the Society, as justifies *Resistance* to the supreme Power; and makes it better to have the Society dissolved, than submit to established Iniquity. Such extraordinary Cases, say they, we can easily conceive there may be, as will give any Man a just Title to seek the Dissolution of the Society to which he belongs, or at least will fully justify his withdrawing from it:” But, in *all other Cases*, it seems, we must *actively obey* every Command of the superior or supreme Powers; be it ever so iniquous! Such Doctrine, coming from *such* Hands, the World may well be amazed at: do Lawyers, too, know no *Medium* betwixt *actively obeying* every Command of the supreme Power, and *resisting* it, or seeking the Dissolution of the Society? Both the highest Patrons of *passive Obedience*, and *their* most strenuous Opposers, can furnish them with one: the first maintaining,

taining, "that in *many* Cases Men may *not* obey,
 " but in *none* are they to *resist*:" and the last, that,
 " in *many* Cases, Men may *not* obey; which yet
 " will not warrant their throwing off the Autho-
 " rity of the supreme Power *altogether*, or seek-
 " ing the Dissolution of the Society:" And our
 Forefathers, in the late unhappy Times, were well
 acquainted with many *such* Cases. But, may we
 not ask the *Dissenters*, Can there, then, be no
 lower Instances of *iniquous Commands*, than such
gross Iniquity as they speak of, which may be
 transgressed, without either seeking the Dissolution
 of the Society, or withdrawing from it? Is it then
 true, "that the *grossest Sins* indeed are never to
 " be committed, in Obedience to iniquous Com-
 " mands of any earthly Power; even tho' *avoid-*
 " *ing* of them should lead to the Dissolution of
 " the Society: But *lesser Sins*, known to be Sins,
 " but the *avoiding* of which is attended with
 " no such Consequence, must be committed, if
 " the Legislative Power in human Society shall
 " happen to require it?" May not *some Instances*
 of Iniquity be *enjoined*, the Injunction *transgressed*,
 and the Transgression *overlooked* too; without *any*
Hazard to the Society; far less the Transgressor's
 being obliged to *seek the Dissolution* of the Soci-
 ety, or, at least, to *withdraw* from it? *No*; ac-
 cording to the Doctrine of *some*, the Strain of
 whose Argument, or rather Cry, in a certain Place,
 was, "If the supreme Judicatory is to pass over
 " not obeying its Appointments in *any* Case; we
 " must *dissolve, disband*, and give up our Govern-
 " ment altogether." *No*; according to the plain
 Doctrine of the *Dissenters*; the constant Burden of
 whose Song is, "Obey in *all* Cases, or withdraw
 " from the Society." But they might as well tell
 us,

us, "that every Transgression of any Law of the
 " Land, or omitting any Thing the Law enjoins,
 " infers *Banishment*; nay, obliges the Transgressor,
 " without any Sentence past against him, to *banish*
 " *himself*." And, seeing it is plainly declared by
 the *Dissenters*, that "no sooner is a Regulation
 " enacted by the Legislative Power in Society,—
 " than even they who disapprove it, are notwith-
 " standing *bound* to obey it; and to put it in Execu-
 " tion, if required; *unless* in a Case of such *gross*
 " Iniquity, and manifest Violation of the original
 " Design of the Society, as justifies *Resistance* to
 " the supreme Power, and makes it better to have
 " the Society dissolved, than to *submit* to establi-
 " shed Iniquity:" It now *comes fairly out*; That
 " let any the most *atrocious Iniquity*, any the most
 " *heinous Sin* against God, be enjoined by the Le-
 " gislative Power on private Persons; which yet
 " does not warrant their seeking the Dissolution of
 " the Society, or their withdrawing from it; they
 " *must* obey the iniquitous Command, without ask-
 " ing Questions." This is *such* Doctrine, from
Ministers and *Office-bearers* in this Church, as no
 Man needs attempt to expose, further than it ex-
 poses itself; and *such*, as we are sure, the *rankest*
Jacobites would be ashamed of! We know not
 why a Man may not "*continue* in a Society, *profess*
 " a Regard for it, and *reap* the Emoluments of it;"
 and yet *refuse*, or *omit*, to obey some *iniquitous*
 Commands, which may sometimes happen to be
 enjoined in the very best Society upon Earth; with-
 out "manifestly acting a *disorderly*, far less a *dishonest*
 " Part; or even *contemning* the Authority of the So-
 " ciety;" though in these Instances he *prefers* the
 Authority of God before it: And we know no-
 thing to hinder any *peaceable* Member of Society,
 though

though he omits obeying *such* Commands, to *lay Claim* to the Privileges of it; till, by the Course of a legal Process and Sentence, he is *deprived* of them. The contrary of *all* this seems plainly to be asserted by the *Dissenters*: But what Proof do they adduce of their *Assertions*? They have not so much as attempted to prove them: They seem to have taken it strongly into their Heads, that they had to do with such *weak* Brethren, that no *hard Arguments* were needful to knock them down; but talking big, and using *hard Words*, would suffice for that Purpose. This notable Maxim, *obey or withdraw*, they repeat, on the next Head, in a pretty remarkable Manner; "Whoever, say they, believes the Censures of the Church too severe, or its Orders in any respect iniquous, so that in Conscience he cannot comply with them, ought to beware of *involving himself in Sin*, by *entring* into it; or if he hath rashly join'd himself, he is bound, as an *honest Man, and a good Christian*, to *withdraw*, and keep his Conscience pure and *undefiled*." We cannot help saying, that so tart a Sneer, delivered in so grave a Manner, and on so serious a Subject, would have been more becoming the Mouths, or Pens, of the old Enemies of the poor Whigs; against whom they are, in a famous Poem, * brought in thus complaining;

*They felled all our Hens and Cocks,
And rooted out our Green-Kail Stocks,
And cast them o'u'r the Dykes away,
And bade us, jeering, Fast and Pray.*

But, to treat it a little more seriously: Do the Gentlemen think to bear us in Hand, or to convince

* The Whigs Supplication.

vince *the World* (to whom they have now appealed) by their confident Assertions, that a Man who has *transgressed* any Law of the Society, is bound, as an *honest* Man, to take it immediately upon himself to be both his *own Judge* and *Executioner*? we believe this would be reckoned rather a *Contempt*, than a *Respect* for the Laws and Order of Society: Is every Man, who, by the Sanction of the Law, has incurred a Sentence of Banishment; obliged as an *honest* Man, immediately to *leave the Country*? if a Man has committed a Transgression of the Law of any Country, which, by that Law, is made Capital; is he forthwith to go *hang himself*? No: we believe he may very *honestly* (especially, if he is not conscious of having committed any *heinous Sin* against God) not only continue in Life, till he is condemned and executed by a legal Process; but even beg the Government to *spare his Life*, if they see it consistent with the publick Good, and the Peace of the Society: And in such a Case, it may be a worthy and becoming Part of an equitable and merciful Government to do it. Some, indeed, we have heard of, who have put violent Hands in themselves, to escape the Infamy of a publick Execution: but we believe it will scarce be in the Power of the *Dissenters*, with all their Rhetorick, and all their *hard Words* to the Bargain, to persuade the *P-----y* of *D-----n*, in any Measure or Degree, to follow their Example.

But, if the Case, fairly stated, comes out somewhat favourably for the Presbytery of *Dunfermline*; it comes out still more favourably for the Rev. Commission. For, it would certainly require a little more Proof, than a bare Assertion, to establish this

Prin-

Principle, "That barely *refraining* from punishing an Offence, or censuring an Act of Disobedience; is *declaring* that the Disobedience neither *infers Guilt*, nor *deserves Censure*:"

The most severe and tyrannical Governments will scarce be found always to go upon such a Maxim, else there would be no End of punishing. And, if barely forbearing to punish even heinous Offences and Crimes, was "surrendring a Right *essential* to the Nature and *Subsistence* of every Society;" our happy Constitution in *Britain* must have gone to Ruin long ago: which, blessed be God, stands a noble Witness against such Maxims. We shall not take Notice of some Instances of the *British* Government quite overlooking Transgressions of penal Laws, which it may be disagreeable to some to mention: But we beg Leave to quote a Passage from a most excellent Performance, addressed to the *Pretender's eldest Son*; in answer to his *second Manifesto*, in the famous Year 1745: the Author of which shows himself a great Master of good *Argument* and *fine Writing*, thorowly well acquainted with our *British* Affairs, and well apprised of any *Facts* he would take upon him to assert. In Page 29 and 30, *London* Edition, speaking of our present Gracious *Sovereign*, he says; "For the *Mildness* of his Government, let this singular Circumstance bear witness; That we are now in the 19th Year of his Reign, and hitherto not one Drop of Blood shed for a *State Crime*, even in the legal Methods of Trial, tho' there have not been wanting Occasions, even before you was pleased to make us a Visit, for just Severities of that Kind." Now; do the Government, by such Instances of Clemency, *declare*, "that such Crimes *infer no Guilt*, and *deserve no*

“Censure?” far from it: Have such Acts of Mercy tended to the Subversion of the excellent *British* Constitution? no; but to its Establishment and Strength: Have they *shown the Weakness* of his Majesty’s *Administration*; or *shaken his Throne*? no: he stands a *glorious Instance* of that Maxim of Holy Writ, *The King’s Throne is upholden by Mercy.*

II. We pass now to the second Reason of the *Dissent*; That “this Sentence of the Commission “is absolutely inconsistent with the Nature and “Preservation of Ecclesiastical Society in particular.” We shall pass by those *Declarations*, which, they say, their Characters render unnecessary of “their Agreement with *all* Protestants, “in acknowledging the Lord Jesus Christ to be “the only King and Head of his Church;” with this one Remark; that we wish they had forebore throwing *Contempt*, a few Lines after, upon a native and direct *Consequence* from that Principle. And seeing they *admit*, “That the Church is a “Society founded by the Laws of Jesus Christ:” we think some of his Laws, delivered by himself and his Apostles, for *preserving Order* and Union in his Church, might be reckoned to deserve a particular, and serious Consideration; such as these “Judge not; that ye be not judged: For, “with *what Judgment* you judge, ye shall be “judged; and with *what Measure* ye mete, it “shall be measured to you again. And why be- “holdest thou the *Mote* that is in thy Brother’s “Eye; and considerest not the *Beam* that is in thine “own Eye? *Mat. vii. 1.-3.* Let us not judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no “Man put a *Stumbling-block*, or an *Occasion to fall*, in “his Brother’s Way.—To him that esteemeth any
Thing

" Thing to be unclean, to him *it is unclean*. If
 " thy Brother be grieved with thy Meat, now
 " walkest thou not charitably; *destroy not him*
 " with thy Meat, *for whom Christ died*. Let not
 " him that eateth *despise him that eateth not*;
 " and let not him which eateth not, *judge him*
 " that eateth; for *God hath received him*; Rom.
 " xiv. 13,---15, 3. Walk worthy of the Voca-
 " tion wherewith ye are called; with all *Lowli-*
 " *ness and Meekness*, with *Long-suffering, forbear-*
 " *ing one another in Love*: Endeavouring to keep
 " the *Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace*;
 " Eph. iv. 1---3. Foolish and unlearned Questi-
 " ons avoid; knowing that they do gender Strifes:
 " and the Servant of the Lord must not strive;
 " but be *gentle unto all Men*, apt to teach, *pa-*
 " *tient*; in *Meekness* instructing those that oppose
 " themselves; 2 Tim. ii. 23---25." How happy
 were it for us, if such sacred Rules were more
 minded by all in the Church at this Day!

The *Dissenters* next quote a Passage of the
Confession of Faith, concerning some Things in the
 Worship of God and the Government of the Church;
 how they are to be ordered: But what are these
 Things? not any *substantial Parts*, or even Rites or
 Ceremonies in Worship, or any important Rules of
 Church Government; but *some Circumstances* con-
 cerning both these; such as the Time and Place of
 holding Meetings for them: And how are these Cir-
 cumstances to be ordered? not by the *arbitrary*
Will and Pleasure of any Men; so as they might
 appoint any Times or Places for them they pleased,
 however *improper*: but, by the *Light of Nature*,
 and *Christian Prudence*; and that too, *according*
to the General Rules of God's Word, which are al-
ways to be observed. But we need not descant upon
 this

this Passage : For what do the *Desenters* infer from it; or what Use do they make of it, to their Purpose? why, none at all; but pass on to other Things. They tell us, that a *Kingdom divided against itself cannot stand*: And what do they infer from that? nothing: may not a Man quietly *restrain* from doing an Action which a Law of the Land requires, but which it appears to him God forbids; without rising in Rebellion, or making an Insurrection in the Kingdom? Again they say, That “ since Miracles are ceased, they *conceive* no “ Church can exist, without Obedience required “ from its Members, and enforced by proper Sancti- “ ons.” Whether is the *ceasing of Miracles* the Cause that *the Church cannot exist without Obedience*, or that the Dissenters *conceive so*? and what is this Obedience, without which a Church cannot exist? Obedience to the arbitrary Commands of fallible Men; Injunctions which appear to them, on whom they are laid, contrary to the Will of God; the supreme Rule of their Duty? May not the Christian Church exist and flourish, by a conscientious Obedience of all its Members and Ministers to the sacred Laws of God and Christ, under a Regard to the awful Sanctions with which they are guarded? It would seem not; according to the Dissenters: For they say, *with Concern*, that *such Principles as these*, “ That the Censures of the “ Church are never to be inflicted, but upon open “ Transgressors of the Laws of Christ himself; “ and that no Man is to be constructed an open “ Transgressor of the Laws of Christ, for not “ obeying the Commands of any Assembly of “ fallible Men, when he declares it was a con- “ scientious Regard to the Will of Christ that led “ him to this Disobedience:” that such Principles appear

appear to them, “calculated to establish the most
 “extravagant Maxims of Independency, and to
 “overthrow that Church Constitution, of which
 “they glory in being Members, from the very
 “Foundation.” For our Part; we own it gives
 us *very great Concern*, to see such Principles as these
 impugned, and so *keenly* too, by any who profess
 to be *Members* of any Christian Church; far more,
 who bear the Character of *Ministers* of the Go-
 spel: And for ourselves, we should rather chuse to
 live independent, as much as we could, of any vi-
 sible Church Constitution whatsoever; than to glo-
 ry in being Members of any Constitution, which
 these Principles were calculated to overthrow from
 the very Foundation. It is of no small Importance,
 to consider these Principles particularly. The first
 of them plainly speaks of the Church of Christ,
 as such; and not as any Part of it may be favour’d
 with a Civil Establishment, or outward Emoluments:
 In this View, we cannot but consider the Censures
 of the Church, properly so called, as Applications
 of the Denunciations of Christ himself, and his
 Apostles, against the *Transgressors of his Laws*;
 and *open* Transgressors they must be, whose Trans-
 gressions fall under the Cognisance of any Court
 on Earth. Nor is that Principle advanced, in the
 Place refer’d to by the Dissenters*; without first
 laying down the plain Foundation of it, from which
 it evidently follows, and is there inferred: Name-
 ly, that Christ is the *alone King* of his Church,
 and its *only Lawgiver*. Does not Christ’s Commis-
 sion to his Apostles themselves, comprize the whole
 Pur-

* Reasons of Dissent from the Sentence of the General
 Assembly, *May 15th 1751*. in the *Scots Magazine* for
May 1751.

Purpose of their Work, in the *Teaching Men to observe all Things whatsoever he had commanded them?* Are not the *Censures* of the Church one Part of the *Methods* by which they were to teach them these *Things*? and therefore be confined to those who, in some Instance or other, neglected, or refused, to observe what Christ had commanded? Is not all the Power, given to his *Apostles* by him, to be exercised to the *Edification* of his Church, and not to *Destruction*? If we consider all the Rules and Directions of our blessed Saviour, or his *Apostles*, concerning Church Discipline; we may be abundantly satisfied, that the Actions, or Neglects, of Men being Sins against God, or, which is the same Thing, Transgressions of the Laws of Christ, and open and scandalous Transgressions too, is the only View in which they fall under the Censures of his Church, properly so called. There may, indeed, be another Power granted to some Part of the Church by the Civil Government, and the Laws of the Land: When *they* annex civil Emoluments to the Office of Ministers in the Church on certain Terms and Conditions; they may trust the Judicatories of the Church with judging, who come up to these Terms, or who come short of them, or fall off from them; and accordingly admitting Men to partake of these legal Advantages, or excluding them from them: But in the Exercise of this Power, *except* in so far as the Actions which fall under their Cognisance are Transgressions of the Law of Christ, as well as of the Laws of the Land, they act not so properly the Part of Ministers of Christ, inflicting Church Censures; as that of Trustees of the Publick, executing those Laws of the Land which are intrusted or left to their Execution. Indeed in the Exercise of

of what is called the Discipline of such an *established Church*, there is often unavoidably a mix'd Kind of Jurisdiction; as Men, by the same Actions, may transgress the legal Terms of the Establishment, and the sacred Laws of Christ, *at the same Time*: but where, without any Transgressions of the Laws of Christ, Men come not up to, or fall off from, the legal Terms of the Establishment; the cutting them off from the Benefits of it is no Exercise of the Discipline of Christ's Church, properly so called; or the Power given to His Ministers by Him, which has nothing to do with giving or taking away Civil Privileges and Emoluments; but only of the Power given them by the Laws of the Land, of declaring who fall short of the Terms, and so are not entitled to the Benefits, of the legal Establishment; though all the while they may be in the Right, in departing from these Terms. For which Reason; a humane, and far more a Christian Spirit, would lead Men to exercise this Power with all the Tenderness and Lenity which Civil Government will permit; instead of taking Advantage of the Power given them by Law, to deprive Men of their legal Privileges and Benefits, or take Steps tending that Way, upon *frivolous Pretences*. 'Tis certainly most becoming Ministers of the Gospel, and Office-bearers in Christ's Church, to exercise *any* Power entrusted to them, with *all* the Prudence and Tenderness they can; and with a sacred Regard to those Laws of Christ, which lay a great Stress upon *Forbearance*, and avoiding to lay a *Stumbling-block*, or an *Occasion to fall*, in our Brother's Way. Nothing can be more unbecoming *them*, than to exercise the Power entrusted to them by the State, in an arbitrary Way: to do hard Things, just because they *dare*, and

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have

have the Sanction of the Law with them: to stretch a Law, they *all* call a *hard* one; and thus make it, in many Cases, *harder* than the Legislature has made it. And scarce any Thing could be more absurd, than to turn Men out of their Benefices; for not acting contrary to Principles, in which they are supported by standing Rules of the Church: or to use this Power contrary to what may reasonably be presumed to be the Design of the Law, in bestowing legal Emoluments upon Ministers; *viz.* that they are given by the Law with a View of some Service to Religion and the Publick, to be done for them.

As to the other Principle, "That Men are not
 " to be constructed open Transgressors of the
 " Laws of Christ, for not obeying the Commands
 " of any Assembly of fallible Men;" it would not appear so very strange to any one, as the Dissenters would have it to be reckoned; had they thought fit to put it down as it stands, in the Place to which they refer: there it is "*merely* for not
 " *obeying, &c.*" The Word *merely* they have thought fit to leave out *; with what Design we shall not say: They might think it of no Importance to their Purpose to *keep* it in: but some of us, who still reckon it our Honour to have our Names at that Dissent, thought it of great Importance to *put* it in; being well aware, that a Man, by the same Action, may be transgressing a plain Law of Jesus Christ, and likewise a Command of fallible Men, honestly teaching him to observe what Christ has commanded, and not any meer Injunctions of their own. But, when that is not the Case; That
 " no Man is to be constructed an open Transgres-
 " for

* *N. B.* In their printed Copy, this is not corrected; among the *Alterations* they have made in the *Language*.

“ for of the Laws of Christ, *merely* for not obey-
 “ ing the Commands of any Assembly of fallible
 “ Men;” we think might be admitted for a *self-*
evident Maxim, by all who allow a Difference be-
 twixt *Christ* and *fallible Men*: and that even with-
 out the Adjection, of his “ declaring it was a consci-
 “ entious Regard to the Will of Christ himself,
 “ that led him to this Disobedience;” which Ad-
 jection was made only, because it came close to the
 Case in which that Dissent was taken: And if it
 gives the Dissenters any Offence, to call the pro-
 fessing these Principles, “ asserting Liberty of
 “ Conscience, and the Right of private Judg-
 “ ment;” we may call it, “ asserting, in the
 “ one of them, a plain Principle of Christianity;
 “ and in the other, as plain a Principle of
 “ Common Sense.” And if the Commission pro-
 ceeded upon such Principles, in coming to the Deci-
 sion complained of; they may *glory* in the Principles
 on which they proceeded. But, say the Dissen-
 ters, “ such Principles appear to us calculated to
 “ establish the most extravagant Maxims of *Inde-*
 “ *pendency*.” If, by this bugbear Word, they
 mean that which is commonly called the *Indepen-*
dent Form of Church-Government, as distinct from
 the *Presbyterian*; we know no Connection *these*
Principles have with the Peculiarities of that Form.
 We must, however, do those of that Perswasion
 (whom we are not ashamed to own for our Bre-
 thren in Christ) the Justice to say; they have *no*
such extravagant Maxims, as “ that a Person open-
 “ ly disobeying the Laws of Christ, has no more
 “ to do, than boldly to pretend Conscience for his
 “ Transgression; and then *no Church*, consisting of
 “ fallible Men, has Right to inflict any Censure
 “ upon him:” On the contrary; many of them
 D 2 require

require more, in order to a Man's Admission to the Privileges of a Christian, than we think they are warranted to do. The *Dissenters* further say, These Principles are "calculated to overthrow, *from the very Foundation*, that happy Ecclesiastical Constitution which they glory in being Members of, and which *they* are resolved to *support*." The Expressions, *from the very Foundation*, are somewhat ambiguous; and we are not forward to force a Sense upon them: But, in short, if their *Ecclesiastical Constitution* is a *Christian Church*; and they mean, that these Principles are calculated to overthrow it, *Foundation and all*; we shall only say, *other Foundation can no Man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ* *; and that we believe, not the Person, but the Confession, of the Apostle *Peter* to be the *Rock*, on which *Christ* has built his Church, with the Assurance that the *Gates of Hell* shall not prevail against it †: If they mean, that these Principles are calculated to overthrow all, *but the Foundation*; why, really, if the *Superstructure* is so disagreeable to the *Foundation*, as to be overthrown by these Principles; there will be no great Harm done: If the *Foundation* stands, a better *Superstructure* may be easily raised upon *that*, in its Place: Such a disagreeable *Superstructure* we all know; and we believe, that "The Lord will consume it with the Spirit of his Mouth, and destroy it with the brightness of his coming ‡;" But God forbid we should believe the Church of *Scotland* to be such a *Superstructure*! God forbid she should ever become so!

But, the *Dissenters* further say, "Upon such Principles, no Church, consisting, as every Church on Earth must consist (they might have

" added

* 1 Cor. iii. 11. † Matth. xvi. 18. ‡ 2 Thess. ii. 8.

" added *since the Days of the Apostles*) of falli-
 " ble Men, has Right to inflict any Censure on
 " any disobedient Person: let such Person only
 " think fit *boldly* to use the Name of Consci-
 " ence &c." If, by a *disobedient* Person, they
 mean, an *open Transgressor* of the *Commands of*
Jesus Christ, and of *Injunctions only teaching him*
to observe these Commands; his *boldly* using the
Name of Conscience must, even in the Eyes of
fallible Men, appear a gross Aggravation of his
 Impiety; to use a Pretence, or Cloak, for his Sin,
 so manifestly inconsistent in a professed Christian;
 and, instead of exempting him from *any Censure*,
 must justly render his Censure the *heavier*. If they
 mean only one who *disobeys* the *Injunctions* of his
fallible Superiors, in Matters of Order, or *some*
Circumstances concerning the Worship of God or
 Government of the Church; he, too, had Need
 do more than *boldly* use the *Name of Conscience*;
 to screen him from *all* Censure; else he may find
 it a *Boldness* with a *Witness*: he had Need to see
 to it, that his Profession be *sincere*; otherwise, he
 must fall under a far *heavier* Punishment from
 the *Searcher of Hearts*, than any Men can
 inflict upon him, for so heinous a *Prevarica-*
tion; a Crime a-kin to that, for which the first
 Transgressors in the Christian Church were struck
 dead upon the Spot: And if, either from the known
 bad Character of the Person making such a Profes-
 sion, or from the Inconsistency of the Profession
 itself, or any other Evidence open to human Cog-
 nifance, such Prevarication is detected; he becomes
 justly liable to the highest Censures of the Church,
 for so gross a Transgression of the sacred Laws of
 Jesus Christ himself: but if so heinous a Prevari-
 cation can no Way be made evident; to *suspect* it
 without

without Ground is a gross Transgression of the Rules of that *Charity* "which *thinketh no Evil.*" 'Tis a daring Boldness, and an arrogant Usurpation of the Province of the *Searcher of Hearts*, for any Man to insinuate, "that this Pretence is made "to cover over *Cowardice*, or the *Fear of being* "less followed by a *Crowd*, or other sinister Views." At the same Time we own, that we should not reckon it a decent Defence for an Inferior before a superior Court, barely to *use* the *Name* of Conscience; or say, he could not in Conscience obey the Injunction laid on him: but should think it much more becoming the Deference due to his Superiors, to lay before them, in a modest and respectful Manner, the particular Reasons, arising from his View of the Case, why he had not Freedom in his Conscience *actively* to obey; or thought it, in these Circumstances, a Sin *in him* to do it: as was done in the present Case; and has been done in all Cases, of the like Nature, we have ever seen before superior Judicatories. As to the Assertion, that "on these Principles a Man sheltered "under the Authority of Conscience, acquires at "once a Right of doing whatsoever is good in his "Eyes:" in one Sense we desire no such Right; in another we acquire it *at once*, by God's making us reasonable Creatures: A Right of doing whatever is good in his own Eyes, darkened by irregular Passions and Appetites, without Regard to the Will of God, no good Man ever claimed: but a Right of doing what, upon the most serious Attention and Consideration, appears to him *good in the Eyes of God and Christ*; is not only the Right of every reasonable Creature of God, and Disciple of Christ; but it is his indispensable Duty to exercise it, without Fear of being *judged of Man's Day*. And (to avoid

avoid all Dispute about Words, in speaking of the Rights of private Judgment, or a Man's personal Perswasion being the Rule of his Duty) we know no Way, in which it is possible for *any Man*, to obey the Commands either of God, or an earthly Superior; but by heedfully *attending* to the *Discoveries* they, any Way, give him of their *Will* and Pleasure; and then, faithfully performing what on such Attention he *conceives* to be their *Mind* and *Will*, and *never* acting *contrary* to it: And, if the Maxim of every Man's private Judgment being the invariable Rule of his Duty, be express'd in such plain Words, it seems a Maxim obvious to Common Sense, and absolutely unquestionable. There is no *fourth* Way any Man can act, in *any Case*; but either by doing what is *right in his own Eyes*, in a lawless Sense; or doing what he *sees with his own Eyes* to be right in the *Eyes of God*; or, putting out *his own Eyes* which God has given him, and *blindly following* the Guidance of *other Men*, wherever they may think fit to lead him; for, to *see with their Eyes*, is absolutely impossible. And we can never imagine, that any "Anarchy and Confusion, far less *irremediable* Confusion, can follow," from every Christian's *always* acting with a conscientious *Regard* to the Will of God and Christ, according to his *best* Views of it.

The Dissenters may well be *sorry to say* it; for, in reality, it is a *woful Saying*; "That Brethren, who † profess to hold † such Principles (as the two above-mentioned) ought—not to have joined themselves to *any Church*; till once they had found out an Assembly of *infallible Men*." Why,

†† This Phrase, in the printed Copy, is changed into *avow*; chusing, we suppose, upon second Thoughts, a more *daring and intimidating* Word.

Why, truly, despairing of ever finding out such an Assembly, we thought ourselves safe in joining ourselves to a *fallible* Church, honestly *professing* to be so; and where the Terms of Communion, required of us at our Entry, appeared to us to contain nothing disagreeable to the Will of God and Christ: little expecting that, many Years after some of us had joined ourselves to it, any of its Members should rise up, and plead in good Earnest, what Sir *Richard Steel* has been found fault with for saying in a jocular Way; "That tho' She *could* err, yet She never *did*;" or, at least, plead for such an absolute, unreserved *active Obedience* to *all* her Injunctions, as can only be due to Assemblies of *infallible* Men; or of whom, at least, we are sure that they never *have* erred, and never *will*. We shall do very well in the Communion of this same *fallible* Church; so long as it allows to the Right of private Judgment *all* the Extent and Obligation that Reason and Religion require. This the Dissenters say for themselves; "*We* allow to the Right of private Judgment "*all* the Extent and Obligation that Reason "*or* Religion require:" but the Misfortune is, we know of no *Priests beyond Sea*, but who may say as much; while they never think fit to tell us, *what* that Extent and Obligation is: We agree with them, in what it *does not* extend to; that "*no* "*Man's* private Judgment gives him a Right to "*disturb, with Impunity, all Publick Order:*" nor can we ever apprehend, that a Christian, or a Minister's following his best private Judgment concerning the Will of God and Christ, will be the *real Cause* of the *Disturbance* of *publick Order* in the Church; however, by those who contend for an *absolute* Authority in its Judicatories, and

Obe-

Obedience without reserve to *all* their Decisions, it may, very innocently on its Part, be *made* the *Occasion* of it. * They recite here, Part of a Section of our Confession of Faith (Chap. 30. § 3.) declaring that "Church Censures are necessary for
 " the reclaiming and gaining of offending Brethren;
 " for deterring of others from the like Offences;
 " for purging out of that Leaven, which might
 " infect the whole Lump" (as we have taken the Liberty to correct this Quotation a little, from the *Text*; so we beg Leave to go on with it, thro' the rest of this, and the following Section :) "for
 " vindicating the Honour of Christ, and the holy
 " Profession of the Gospel; and for preventing
 " the Wrath of God, which might justly fall upon
 " the Church, if they should suffer his Covenant
 " and the Seals of it to be prophaned, by *noto-*
 " *rious and obstinate Offenders.*" Is it *Offenders* against the *Laws of Christ*, or *Transgressors* of the *Commandments of Men*, that are here spoke of? But, to go on; § 4. "For the better attaining of
 " these Ends, the Officers of the Church are to pro-
 " ceed by Admonition, Suspension from the Sacra-
 " ment of the Lord's Supper for a Season, and by
 " Excommunication from the Church, according to
 " the Nature of the Crime, and Demerit of the Per-
 " son." From this full Quotation, we think, every one may more *easily learn* "what the censures of the
 " Church are, and what the Crimes against which
 " they are directed;" than by being sent so far about, as the *Dissenters* would have us go, to the
 " Constitution of every Church," to learn them *easily*.

Upon the other *Assertions* of the *Dissenters*, on this Head, we shall add nothing to what has
 E been

* 1 Kings^{xviii.} 17, 18.

been said above; from which it may sufficiently appear how much they are to the Purpose of condemning the *Sentence of the Reverend Commission*. Nor, for the same Reason, shall we attempt to follow them, through *all* their loose and ill connected *Affertions*, on the subsequent Heads; particularly, the

III. Where they alledge, That “the Sentence of the Commission is, in a particular Manner, inconsistent with Presbyterian Church Government.” The Nature of that Government, as “distinguished from every other Ecclesiastical Constitution,” and particularly from the *Independent System*, is described, in the Formula which all our Ministers subscribe, to be “the Government of this Church by Kirk-Sessions, Presbyteries, Provincial Synods, and General Assemblies:” The Excellency of *that Subordination* appears to us to lie, not in the Power of Church-Courts to distress their Brethren; but, in the Access which Parties have, when they think themselves injured, to seek Redress, by *Appeals* to the Superior Courts; who, no doubt, have Power to take the *Execution*, as well as the *Judgment*, into their own Hands, when particular Circumstances point out the Expediency of their doing so: and we should be at a Loss to see, how, “by the *Parity of its Ministers*, the Church is preserved from exercising that Lordship and Dominion over their Brethren, which is condemned by our Saviour,” as the Dissenters say; if still they should assume the Power of exercising that Dominion when *assembled* together, which they cannot exercise *singly* and apart.

The Dissenters say, “they do not pretend to *vest* any Court with Infallibility: but they cannot help

" help being surpris'd, that any of their Brethren
 " should have been at a Loss to conceive this plain
 " and obvious Principle, That it is essential to
 " the very Idea of a supreme Judicatory, that its
 " Decisions be *absolute* and final." " That they be
 " *final*, so as to be reverfible *only* by themselves;"
 we have already declared, we are at *no Loss* to
 conceive: But as to their being *absolute*, so as *all*
 of them are to be actively obeyed, without Reserve
 or Exception; we must still be the Objects of the
 Surprize of the Dissenters: for, we are so far from
 being able to conceive it to be a plain and obvious
 Principle, that *this* is " essential to the very Idea
 " of a supreme Judicatory;" that we rather ap-
 prehend it *essentially contrary* to the *very Idea* of
any Court not vested with Infallibility.

It is the less necessary to enter into the particular
 Consideration of the dreadful Consequences, which
 it is alledged would follow from the Decisions of
 the General Assembly being, in *any* Case, " dis-
 " puted and disobeyed by inferior Courts, with
 " Impunity;" which the Dissenters speak of
 in a pretty ranting Strain; that they them-
 selves tell us, for our Comfort, that " Our
 " wiser Ancestors took the proper Steps to guard
 " against *such Dangers*; by establishing solemn
 " Subscriptions and Engagements, to bind the Mi-
 " nisters of this Church to Obedience and Submis-
 " sion to its Judicatories; which Engagements
 " *they* heartily wish were more attended to and
 " regarded." But here it happens a little unluckily
 for *their* Cause, that, in *all* these Subscriptions and
 Engagements, as they are particularly recited by
 themselves, there is not such a Word as *Obedience*;
 far less *such a Phrase*, as *Obedience without Re-
 serve*; our wiser Ancestors not apprehending, it

would seem, such a Thing necessary for avoiding any "Danger from licentious Principles:" The Word *Obedience* the *Dissenters*, indeed, are pleased to thrust in; both in laying down their *Position* and in drawing their *Conclusion*: but, there is no such Word in the Premises, from which it is drawn *.

But let us see if they are more lucky, in their History of what passed *about an hundred Years ago*: then they tell us, "the same Anti-constitutional Maxims, which were advanced to support the Sentence of which they complain, were brought into this Kingdom by *English* Sectaries, or by certain Persons, who, living amongst them, had

" imbi-

* The Dissenters from the Sentence of the Assembly 1751, censuring the Presbytery of *Linlithgow, &c.* being all *fallible Men*, committed a Mistake of Memory (which the Dissenters now, in a Note on Page 18th of their printed Reasons, endeavour to make the most of) in asserting, that "our Subscription and Engagement to Obedience and Submission to the Judicatories of this Church, is with the *express* Limitation of its being *in the Lord*." The Truth is; they had not *five or six Weeks* given them, to prepare their Reasons of Dissent; but were obliged to do it in broken Peices of *two Days*, amidst the Hurry of a close Attendance upon Meetings of the Assembly; and so had no Time to look into the *Formula*, but were obliged to quote it *memoriter*: and we could appeal to the present Dissenters, whether some of them were not, till very lately, in the same Mistake. As to the Sense put upon these Words, supposing them to be in the *Formula*, we cannot see how any Man could have understood them otherwise. It is said that, "as this Limitation is understood and applied, they might safely have promised Obedience to *any Power whatever*:" but, however that may be, they do not think they could safely have promised absolute Obedience, without Reserve or Limitation to any earthly Power whatever.

“ imbibed their Principles, and endeavoured to im-
 “ port them into our Church: but, to give a timely
 “ Check to their Progress, the Assembly 1647,”—
 after some previous Steps, “ unanimously agreed
 “ to this Proposition, amongst others;” *That the*
lesser and inferior Ecclesiastical Assemblies ought
to be subordinate and subject unto the greater and
superior Assemblies. What; no more? do they
 add, “ that they are *actively* to obey all their Ap-
 “ pointments without Reserve?” Keep off such
 an Addition; and there are none among us, whom
 the *Dissenters* are the most forward to charge with
Anti-constitutional Maxims, but will as *unani-*
mously approve the Proposition, as it stands, as the
 Assembly 1647 did: There is no Word of Obe-
 dience in *that* Proposition; more than in *our* Sub-
 scriptions and Engagements. We know not, there-
 fore, what Light it might have given into the pre-
 sent Question, had the *Dissenters* thought fit to
 give us *their* more particular Account, what these
Anti-constitutional Maxims were, which were then
 “ brought into this Kingdom by *English* Sectaries,
 “ or Persons living amongst them.” But, as they
 tell us, they were “ the *same* which were ad-
 “ vanced to support the Sentence of the Commis-
 “ sion complained of;” and it may be presumed,
 therefore, they were of the same Kind with the
 Principles above-mentioned, which *they* so keenly
 impugn: we shall endeavour to supply that Defect;
 by setting down some of these *same* Maxims,
 which, about *that* Time, were *imported* into this
 Church; with the *Authors* of them, then *living*
 among the *English* *Sectaries*: and then shall en-
 quire what our Church did to *oppose* these Maxims,
 and give *Check* to their *Progress*. And, we must
 beg leave to mention, in the first Place, the *Com-*
 compilers

piters of the Confession of Faith at Westminster; who, living amongst the English Sectaries, endeavoured to import into our Church, by its own Commissioners at London, such *Anti-constitutional* Maxims as these; That "the supreme Judge, by which all Controversies of Religion are to be determined; and all Decrees of Councils, Opinions of antient Writers, Doctrines of Men, and private Spirits, are to be examined; and in whose Sentence we are to rest; can be no other, but the Holy Spirit, speaking in the Scripture," Chap. 1. § 10. That "God alone is Lord of the Conscience; and hath left it free from the Doctrines and Commandments of Men, which are in any Thing contrary to his Word, or beside it, in Matters of Faith or Worship: So that, to believe such Doctrines, or to obey such Commands, *out of Conscience*, is to betray true *Liberty of Conscience*; and the requiring of an implicate Faith, and an absolute and blind Obedience, is to destroy *Liberty of Conscience*, and Reason also," Chap. 20, § 2. That "All Synods or Councils, since the Apostles Times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred: therefore they are not to be made the Rule of Faith or Practice; but to be used as an Help in both," Chap. 31, § 4. Another Set of these *Importers*, who lived among the English Sectaries about that Time, were the London Presbyterian Ministers; who (in a pretended Defence of Presbyterian Government, against the Independents too *) endeavoured, by their Use of the Liberty of the Press, to introduce and import into this Church such *Anti-constitutional* Maxims

* *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici*, p. 230.

Maxims as these; That "the highest Ecclesiastical
 " Assembly in the World cannot require from the
 " lowest, a *Subordination absolute*, and *pro arbi-*
 " *trio*, i. e. at their own Will and Pleasure;
 " but only in some Respect; *Subordination abso-*
 " *lute* being only to the Law of God laid down
 " in Scripture. We detest *Popish* Tyranny, which
 " claims a Power of giving their Will for a Law:
 " it is *Subjection in the Lord* that is pleaded for.
 " The straightest Rule in the World, unless the
 " Holy Scripture, we affirm to be *regulam regu-*
 " *latam*, that is, a Rule to be regulated; Peace
 " being only in walking according to Scripture
 " Canon. That "the *Judgment of discerning*
 " belongs to every Christian, for the well ordering
 " of his own Act; terming the Man a *brutum*
 " *agens*, who does *whatever* the Church enjoins.
 " That "the Power of Synods is not absolute
 " and infallible, but limited and fallible: Any
 " Council and Synod may err; being constitute
 " of Men that are weak, frail and ignorant in
 " Part, &c. and therefore all their Decrees and
 " Determinations are to be examined by the
 " Touchstone of the Scriptures; nor are further
 " to be embraced, or counted obligatory, than
 " they are consonant thereunto."

About the same Time, there lived among the
English Sectaries one *John Hales*, commonly
 called the ever-memorable Mr. Hales of *Eaton*
 Colledge; who, by the ordinary Conveyances from
 the Prefs, endeavoured to *import* into this Church
 this *Anti-constitutional* Maxim; "That, when ei-
 " ther false or uncertain Conclusions are obtruded
 " for Truth; and Acts, either unlawful, or *mini-*
 " *string just* *Scruple*, are required of us to be
 " performed: in those Cases, Consent were Con-
 " spiracy;

“Spiracy; and open Contestation is not Faction
 “or Schism, but due Christian Animosity:” with
 several other Maxims of the like Kind. We might
 also mention the great Mr. *Chillingworth*; and
 many others *living* among the *English Sectaries*
 about that Time; who had strongly *imbibed* such
Anti-constitutional Maxims, as we have now men-
 tioned, and endeavoured by the same Means to
import them into this Church,

But, after all the Search we have been able to
 make, in a short Time; we cannot find out, what
 our Church did to oppose these *Anti-constitutional*
 Maxims, and *give a Check to their Progress*. On
 the contrary, we find that *same* Assembly 1647
 receiving and adopting that *Westminster Confession*
of Faith, in which such Maxims are so strongly
 expressed; and that with high Encomiums, and
 great Thanksgivings to God for it; and with an
 Explication only on *one* Article, which has no
 Relation to these *Anti-constitutional* Maxims. And,
 a great while before that, our Church had made
 this *Anti-constitutional* Act; “That no Person be
 “intruded in any Office of the Kirke, contrare to
 “the Will of the Congregation to which they are
 “appointed.” And, even so late as the Year
 1736, the General Assembly made the following
 Act; which, on the Principles of the Dissenters,
 “must be extremely *Anti-constitutional*: “*Edin-*
 “*burgh, May 25th 1736. The General Assem-*
 “*bly, considering from Act of Assembly, August*
 “*6th 1575; 2d Book of Discipline, chap. 3. Par.*
 “*4, 6 and 8, registrate in the Assembly Books,*
 “and appointed to be subscribed by all Ministers,
 “and ratified by Acts of Parliament; and likewise
 “the Act of Assembly, 1638 *December 17th and*
 “*18th; and Assembly 1715, Act 9: that it is,*
 “and

" and has been since *the Reformation*, a *Principle*
 " of this Church, that no Minister shall be intru-
 " ded into any Parish, contrary to the Will of the
 " Congregation: Do therefore seriously recom-
 " mend to *all* Judicatories of this Church, to have
 " a *due Regard* to the said Principle in *planting*
 " *vacant Congregations*: and that all Presbyteries
 " be at Pains to bring about Harmony and Unani-
 " mity in Congregations, and to avoid every Thing
 " that may excite or encourage unreasonable Ex-
 " ceptions in People against a worthy Person that
 " may be proposed to be their Minister, in the pre-
 " sent Situation and Circumstances of the Church,
 " so as *none* be intruded into such Parishes; as they
 " regarded the Glory of God, and Edification of
 " the Body of Christ." May we not here ask the
 Question; whether, while this Act stands *unre-*
pealed, it be *proper* for any Judiciary of this
 Church, or even *competent* for a *delegated* Judica-
 tory to bear hard upon, or censure, any Minister,
 or Presbytery, for *not obeying any particular Ap-*
pointment, that seems to fly in the Face of this
 standing Rule of the Church? as the last Assembly
 censured the P----y of L----w; after they had pled
 at their Bar (and were not then contradicted) that,
 for them to have *obeyed* the Appointment, would
 have been to have ordained a Minister to five or six
 Persons, of a *Congregation* consisting of about a
 Thousand.

IV. On the fourth Head, the *Dissenters* alledge,
 " That the Sentence of the Commission is incon-
 " sistent with the *uniform Practice* and Procedure
 " of the Presbyterian Church." For Proof of
 this *general* Assertion, they bring only *one* Instance,
 of the General Assembly 1646, finding Fault with
 a Minister, for *continuing* in the Exercise of his

Ministry after a Sentence of his Presbytery *suspending* him from it, from which he had appealed to the General Assembly; without waiting for the *Issue* of his *own Appeal*; which it appears would have been *favourable* to him, against the Presbytery. How this Instance comes any Way near to the Case, of Mens barely *not* doing, what, on the most deliberate Consideration, they thought *sinful* to do; we must confess we are at a *Loss to conceive*: especially, as the *Dissenters* give us no Account, what Mr *Morison* pled in his Defence before that Assembly; so that it does not appear that he ever so much as pretended *he thought it sinful* to submit to the Sentence of the Presbytery.

In this Article, the Dissenters are pleased to assert, that “the dangerous Tenets of *Independency* spread fast; and have, in all Appearance, infected some of our own Members.” But ‘tis hoped, such *general* and *unsupported* Assertions will obtain no Credit or Regard with Men of Candor and Integrity.

V. The fifth Reason of *Dissent* is, that “they conceive this Sentence ----- will justify any Contradiction to the Doctrines of the Church;” and warrant “the espousing and publishing the most *wild, erroneous and hurtful* Opinions,” without any Censure: but what Proof do they bring of this formidable Assertion? None; but, in their usual Way, affirming it in a pompous Manner: and it is absolutely impossible for them to prove it; unless they will maintain, and make the *Commission* maintain too, that “the most *wild, erroneous and hurtful* Opinions may be *espoused and published*, without *openly transgressing* any *Law of Jesus Christ*: which is a Task that they will, perhaps, find too hard for them to undertake.

VI. As

VI. As to the alledged *Inconsistency* of *this* Sentence, with the Sentence of the Commission in *November*; “ appointing the Presbytery of *Dunfermline* to admit Mr. *Richardson* as Minister of *Inverkeithing*, on the 3d *Monday* of *January*, &c. with Certification, that the Commission at their Meeting in *March* next will proceed to a *very high Censure*, in Case of Disobedience.” Can it be pretended, than an Appointment, under any Sanction, must be understood to mean, that the Censure *shall* be inflicted, whatever Defences be made, or tho’ the most *unanswerable* Reasons are given, for *not obeying*? If so: how could the *Dissenters* agree to allow, and even require, that Presbytery to appear at the Bar of the Commission in *March*, to give an Account of the Reasons of their Conduct? how could *they*, after hearing their Defences, propose the inflicting a *low* Censure upon them? nay, how could they, in a Consistency with the Sanction of the Commission in *November*, propose the *referring* of the whole Affair to the General Assembly, without the Commission’s inflicting any Censure? and insist upon that *Proposal*, till it was determined against them by a Vote?

VII. As to the Allegdgence, of the Commission’s acting inconsistently with the Sentence of the last Assembly, in the Case of the Presbytery of *Linlithgow*; let it be observed, that Sentences of the General Assembly in particular Causes, are no standing Rules of the Church: that other Assemblies, in like Cases, have given very *different* Decisions; and it was obvious to every one to observe; by how very *small* a Number of Voices, in a very numerous and throng Meeting of the Assembly, that *Vote* to Censure the Presbytery of *Linlithgow* carried. And might it not appear to the Reverend

Commission, that, as they were a *delegated Judicatory*, the *highest Severity* did not become them, which might be reckoned becoming the supreme Court itself; but that it became them to exercise their *delegated Power* with more *Lenity* and Gentleness? especially, considering, that they were to answer for their Conduct, not to the *last*, but to the *ensuing Assembly*: and as it is no new Thing among us, that the Guile of our Assemblies alters a little; might they not imagine, they had some Room to hope, that *this Assembly* might find it *just*, or *prudent*, to incline to *Lenity*, in like Cases with those, in which former Assemblies had shown a *leaning to Severity*?

And thus, we have gone through the heavy Task, of making some Remarks on the several Heads of the Reasons of Dissent: for the *last Head* we thought it proper to consider in the first Place.

But, as we are sensible that the Stress of the Argument, for never passing by *any* Instance of omitting to obey, or execute the Sentence of a Superior, or the supreme Court, will be laid, by many, upon the *Consequences* of such Forbearance; we find ourselves obliged to say some Things to this Argument: tho' we are obliged to pick it up from broken Hints, scattered up and down this Performance of the Dissenters. And

1. They are pleased to say (not in their Reasons of Dissent, but in a Marginal-note on Page 5th of their printed Copy) that "to plead Conscience, as
" a Defence against the Censures of Ecclesiastical,
" or the Punishments of Civil Society, is an Absurdity in Government." The Comparison appears to us extremely wide, betwixt *Ecclesiastical* and *Civil Government*. As the End of Civil Government

vernment is the Preservation of the *outward* Peace of Society; and its Object is the *outward* Actions of Men *only*, and these considered in the View of their being beneficial or hurtful to human Society; the Ends of that Government make it necessary to punish *outward* Actions of Men, that are *hurtful* to their Neighbours, or *disturb* the Peace of Society; without Regard, either to the Pretences by which they may be palliated, or the *inward* Principles from which they proceed. The Case, we apprehend, is quite otherwise, with respect to Ecclesiastical Discipline and Censures: the Object of these being the Actions of professed Christians, considered as *Transgressions* of the *Laws of Christ*; and the great End of them to *reform the Mind*, and preserve the Church a *pure* Society, in a *religious* Sense; we must think, that great Regard is to be had to Conscience in the Exercise of them. The next Passage in *that Note* is, "We must either admit, that it [the Plea of Conscience] can justify the Violation of *no* Law; or allow, that it will justify the Violation of *every* Law." This we may well suffer to stand, without any Remark; especially, after what we have already said, Page 29. And we can never allow, what they say "that the Guilt or Innocence of *open Transgressors* of the *Laws of Christ* is known *only* to themselves." We readily allow, that, if the Plea of Conscience is admitted, as a Defence from Censure, in *any* Cases; fallible Judges, who cannot see into the Hearts of Men, may run the Hazard of admitting it, sometimes, when it may be only a Pretence: but does it, therefore, follow, that it is *never* to be admitted? We apprehend Lawyers would say, to this Point; *abusus non tollit usum*. Such is the unavoidable Frailty of *all* human Governments,

Laws

Laws and Rules; that a *guilty* Man may escape Punishment, by these very *Methods and Precautions*, which are necessary to give a Man a *fair Trial* for his *Life*, and to preserve an *innocent* Man from being *condemned to die*: but, in answer to such Difficulties, it is commonly, and very justly said, “Better *ten* guilty Persons escape, than *one* innocent Person suffer.”

But it is said, “Such Exercises of *Lenity* encourage *Disobedience* to the Appointments of the Church.” Sure, the less Arbitrary Superiors are, in their Commands; the more ingenuous Minds must be encouraged to obey them, as far as Conscience towards God allows: and as no *Lenity* is pleaded for, but towards such *Transgressions* of the *Commandments of Men*, as Persons of known Integrity can lay their Hands on their Breasts, and declare, that after seriously weighing the Matter, they thought it *sinful in them* to obey: exercising *Lenity*, in such Cases, will only be giving *no Discouragement to Simplicity and godly Sincerity*; which will not, we hope, be reckoned an *Evil* so excessively abounding in our Day, as to want any severe Checks or Discouragements.

Again, it is said, “passing by such *Transgressions*, without Censure, will show the *Weakness of our Church*.” But, we apprehend, it may be found; that, “nothing more effectually shows *Weakness*, in the Issue, than too strong and forward a Show of Power.” If Church Judicatories give Unnecessary, and Arbitrary Commands, and are forward to inflict Censures upon every *Transgression*: if this brings them into an apprehended Necessity, after censuring the *Disobedience* of a *hard* Command; to *renew* the *Command*, while the *Difficulties* in the Way of obeying

ing it, that have been fairly represented, are known not to be removed: then, from *lesser* Censures, not taking the intended Effect, it may be reckoned a necessary *Show of Power* to proceed to *greater*; and so on, till they go to the highest: may not this, in the Issue, bring a Number of Men, who have been useful in the Church, under a *double* Necessity; both of looking out for some Way of being useful in their Station, without the Restraint of Terms, which appear to them hard and iniquous; and of providing for themselves and their Families, in a Way which then appears to them both lawful and necessary? and may not all this, very naturally, issue in *strengthening* a Party, the *Growth* of which in *Strength* naturally *weakens* the established Church, and hurts the Interests of Religion among us? It should seem, therefore, that the wisest and most effectual Methods, of the Church's preserving and improving her Strength; and in the Issue *showing* it; are to forbear giving arbitrary and unnecessary Commands; to be cautious of *beginning* the Work of *censuring*, for Transgressions that might be quite overlooked, without any Harm either to the Interests of Religion, or the legal Constitution of the Church; to be ready to take the *easiest*, and least straitning Methods of executing Sentences, which are apprehended necessary to be brought into Execution; and in fine, not to affect a *Show of Infallibility*; or be ashamed even of reversing Sentences, which, after they are made, may be found *hard* and grievous.

But it is said, "It shows the Weakness of our Church Constitution, not to be able *always* to bring the Sentences of its Judicatures into Execution in the most *constitutional* Way." Why this may indeed show, that our Constitution is not

Al.

Almighty: that it partakes of the Weaknesses and Infirmities common to *all* human Constitutions whatsoever; that they cannot *always* accomplish their Designs in the *shortest* and most direct Way; but must *sometimes* take more round-about Ways of doing it, provided they be lawful ones. And is such a Consequence as this to be put in the Balance, with either depriving valuable and useful Men of their Charges, and the Church of their Usefulness; or laying hard Temptations before any Men, to violate and debauch their Consciences? the very *worst* Purpose that ever Power or Authority was, or can be, applied to!

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